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ABSTRACT

This booklet presents the statement of the United States Catholic Conference on the topic of violence in society and how as a nation and as individuals people must work to ensure a more peaceful world. The booklet addresses the need for a moral revolution and a renewed ethic of justice, responsibility, and community. Several examples of renewal are described in dioceses, parishes, and schools across the country. Sections include: (1) "Introduction"; (2) "A Culture of Violence"; (3) "Catholic Tradition, Presence, and Potential"; (4) "A Framework for Action"; (5) "We Can Be More Than We Are"; and (6) "Conclusion." Suggestions for action are given for the parish, the individual, educators, the family, public policy, the community, youth ministry, communications, and the global solidarity, peacemaking movement. (EH)

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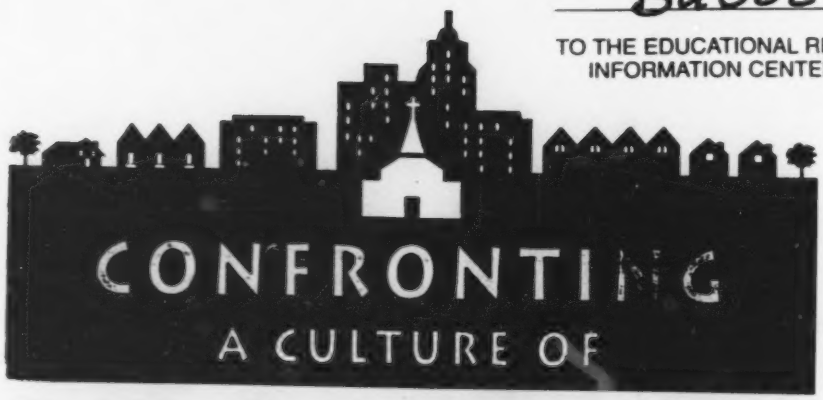

CONFRONTING A CULTURE OF VIOLENCE

A CATHOLIC FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

A CATHOLIC CHILDREN FIRST FAMILIES CAMPAIGN

A Pastoral Message of the U.S. Catholic Bishops

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Confronting A Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action was developed by the Committee for Domestic Social Policy at the urging of a number of other committees of the Conference. After review and approval by the Committee, the reflection was approved by the Administrative Board in September 1994 and by the body of bishops at their General Meeting in November 1994. The accompanying "Suggestions for Action" were reviewed and approved by the Domestic Policy Committee. *Confronting A Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action* is authorized for publication as a statement of the United States Catholic Conference by the undersigned.

Monsignor Robert N. Lynch
General Secretary
NCCB/USCC

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"CHOOSE LIFE,
THEN,
THAT YOU
AND YOUR
DESCENDANTS
MAY LIVE."

(DEUTERONOMY 30:19)

"IF YOU
WANT PEACE,
WORK FOR
JUSTICE."

(POPE PAUL VI)

"BLESSED
ARE THE
PEACE-
MAKERS..."

(MATTHEW 5:9)

I.
INTRODUCTION

Our families are torn by violence. Our communities are destroyed by violence. Our faith is tested by violence. We have an obligation to respond.

Violence—in our homes, our schools and streets, our nation and world—is destroying the lives, dignity, and hopes of millions of our sisters and brothers. Fear of violence is paralyzing and polarizing our communities. The celebration of violence in much of our media, music, and even video games is poisoning our children.

Beyond the violence in our streets is the violence in our hearts. Hostility, hatred, despair, and indifference are at the heart of a growing culture of violence. Verbal violence in our families, communications, and talk shows contributes to this culture of violence. Pornography assaults the dignity of women and contributes to violence against them. Our social fabric is being torn apart by a culture of violence that leaves children dead on our streets and families afraid in our homes. Our society seems to be growing numb to human loss and suffering. A nation born in a commitment to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" is haunted by death, imprisoned by fear, and caught up in the elusive pursuit of protection rather than happiness. A world moving beyond the Cold War is caught up in bloody ethnic, tribal, and political conflict.

It doesn't have to be this way. It wasn't always this way. We can turn away from violence; we can build communities of greater peace. It begins with a clear conviction: respect for life. Respect for life is not just a slogan or a program; it is a fundamental moral principle flowing from our teaching on the dignity of the human person. It is an approach to life that values people over things. Respect for life must guide the choices we make as individuals and as a society: what we do and won't do, what we value and con-

sume, whom we admire and whose example we follow, what we support and what we oppose. Respect for human life is the starting point for confronting a culture of violence.

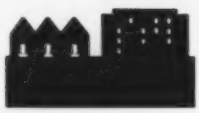
The Catholic community cannot ignore the moral and human costs of so much violence in our midst. These brief reflections are a call to conversion and a framework for action. They propose neither a sweeping plan nor specific programs. They recognize the impressive efforts already underway in dioceses, parishes, and schools. They offer a word of support and gratitude for those already engaged in these efforts. We believe the Catholic community brings strong convictions and vital experience which can enrich the national dialogue on how best to overcome the violence that is tearing our nation apart.

Fear of violence is paralyzing and polarizing our communities.

We know these reflections are not enough. Words cannot stop weapons; statements will not contain hatred. Yet commitment and conversion can change us and together we can change our culture and communities. Person by person, family by family, neighborhood by neighborhood, we must take back our communities from the evil and fear that come with so much violence. We believe our faith in Jesus Christ gives us the values, vision, and hope that can bring an important measure of peace to our hearts, our homes, and our streets.

II.
A CULTURE OF VIOLENCE

Decades ago, the Kerner Commission called violence "as American as apple pie."[1] Sadly, this provocative statement has proved prophetic. No nation on earth, except those in the midst of war, has as much violent behavior as we do—in our homes, on our televisions, and in our streets:



Respect for human life is the starting point for confronting a culture of violence.

- While crime statistics vary year to year, we face far higher rates of murder, assault, rape, and other violent crimes than other societies. One estimate is that crime costs us $674 billion a year. Violent crime quadrupled from 161 reported crimes per 100,000 in 1960 to 758 in 1992.[2]
- The most violent place in America is not in our streets, but in our homes. More than 50 percent of the women murdered in the United States are killed by their partner or ex-partner. Millions of children are victims of family violence.[3]
- The number of guns has also quadrupled from 54 million in 1950 to 201 million in 1990. Between 1979 and 1991, nearly 50,000 American children and teenagers were killed by guns, matching the number of Americans who died in battle in Vietnam. It is now estimated 13 American children die every day from guns. Gunshots cause one out of four deaths among American teenagers.[4]

1. Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (Washington, D.C.), 1968.
2. Based on reports of the U.S. Department of Justice and Department of Commerce, 1993.
3. "Violence against Women," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, June 17, 1992.
4. The National Center for Health Statistics, unpublished data for 1991.

- Our entertainment media too often exaggerate and even celebrate violence. Children see 8,000 murders and 100,000 other acts of violence on television before they leave elementary school.[5]
- We must never forget that the violence of abortion has destroyed more than 30 million unborn children since 1972.[6]

Behind these numbers are individual human tragedies, lives lost, families destroyed, children without real hope.

Violence in our culture is fed by multiple forces—the disintegration of family life, media influences, growing substance abuse, the availability of so many weapons, and the rise of gangs and increasing youth violence. No one response can address these diverse sources. Traditional liberal or conservative approaches cannot effectively confront them. We have to address simultaneously declining family life and the increasing availability of deadly weapons, the lure of gangs and the slavery of addiction, the absence of real opportunity, budget cuts adversely affecting the poor, and the loss of moral values.

While many communities are touched by crime and the fear that comes with it, violence especially ravages poor communities. Young people are particularly threatened by violence. In some communities, teens talk of "if" they grow up, instead of "when" they grow up, planning their funerals instead of their futures. Between 1985 and 1992, the annual number of youth killed by guns grew from 2,500 to 5,326.[7]

Increasingly, our society looks to violent measures to deal with some of our most difficult social problems—millions of abortions to address problem pregnancies, advocacy of euthanasia and assisted suicide to cope with the burdens of age and illness, and increased reliance on the death penalty to deal with crime. We

5. American Psychological Association, 1992.
6. Guttmacher Institute, "Facts in Brief—Abortion in the United States," August 1994.
7. The National Center for Health Statistics, unpublished data for 1991.

are tragically turning to violence in the search for quick and easy answers to complex human problems. A society which destroys its children, abandons its old, and relies on vengeance fails fundamental moral tests. Violence is not the solution; it is the most clear sign of our failures. We are losing our respect for human life. How do we teach the young to curb their violence when we embrace it as the solution to social problems?

We cannot teach that killing is wrong by killing. We have reached the point in one very visible case where a jury has urged the execution of the person who murdered the physician who was destroying unborn children. This cycle of violence diminishes all of us—especially our children. For our part, we oppose both the violence of abortion and the use of violence to oppose abortion. We are clear in our total repudiation of any effort to advocate or carry out murder in the name of the pro-life cause. Such acts cannot be justified. They deny the fundamental value of each human life and do irreparable harm to genuine pro-life witness. Just as clearly, a nation destroying more than one and a half million unborn children every year contributes to the pervasive culture of violence in our nation. We must affirm and protect all life, especially the most vulnerable in our midst.

Likewise, we cannot ignore the underlying cultural values that help to create the environment where violence grows: a denial of right and wrong, education that ignores fundamental values, an abandonment of personal responsibility, an excessive and selfish focus on our individual desires, a diminishing sense of obligation to our children and neighbors, a misplaced priority on acquisitions, and media glorification of violence and sexual irresponsibility. In short, we often fail to value life and cherish human beings above possessions, power, and pleasure.

Less obvious and less visible is the slow motion violence of discrimination and poverty, hunger and hopelessness, addiction and self-destructive behavior. The deterioration of family life and the loss of community leave too many without moral direction

and personal roots. Grinding poverty and powerlessness leave too many without a stake in society and a place in our community. Economic, social, and moral forces can tear apart communities and families not as quickly, but just as surely, as bullets and knives. Lives sometimes are diminished and threatened not only in the streets of our cities, but also by decisions made in the halls of government, the boardrooms of corporations, and the courts of our land. An ethic of respect for life should be a central measure of all our institutions—community, economic, political, and legal.

Person by person, family by family, neighborhood by neighborhood, we must take back our communities from the evil and fear that come with so much violence.

This growing culture of violence reflected in some aspects of our public life and entertainment media must be confronted. But it is not just our policies and programming that must change; it is our hearts. We must condemn not only the killing but also the abuse in our homes, the anger in our hearts, and the glorification of violence in movies and music. It is time, in the words of Deuteronomy (30:19), to "Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live. . . ." We must join with Pope John Paul II to "proclaim, with all the conviction of my faith in Christ and with an awareness of my mission, that violence is evil, that violence is unacceptable as a solution to problems, that violence is unworthy. . . . Violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity."[8]

Around the globe, we are seeing the promises of a new world lost in deadly conflict and renewed war. In Bosnia, Rwanda, Haiti, Sudan, and so many other places, the world too often has watched as sisters and brothers were killed because of their religion, race, tribe, or political position. The post-Cold War world has become a tumult of savage attacks on the innocent. Unprepared for this disorder and confused about what to do to resolve ancient rivalries, the international community has too often stood by indecisively as hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children have been slaughtered and millions more have been maimed,

8. Pope John Paul II, "Address in Killineer, Ireland," September 1979.

raped, and driven from their homes. Peacekeeping and peacemaking are the most urgent priorities for a new world.

In some communities, teens talk of "if" they grow up, instead of "when" they grow up, planning their funerals instead of their futures.

Not all violence is deadly. It begins with anger, intolerance, impatience, unfair judgements, and aggression. It is often reflected in our language, our entertainment, our driving, our competitive behavior, and the way we treat our environment. These acts and attitudes are not the same as abusive behavior or physical attacks, but they create a climate where violence prospers and peace suffers. We are also experiencing the polarization of public life and militarization of politics with increased reliance on "attack" ads, "war" rooms, and intense partisan combat in place of the search for the common good and common ground.

Fundamentally, our society needs a moral revolution to replace a culture of violence with a renewed ethic of justice, responsibility, and community. New policies and programs, while necessary, cannot substitute for a recovery of the old values of right and wrong, respect and responsibility, love and justice. God's wisdom, love, and commandments can show us the way to live, heal, and reconcile. "Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal" are more than words to be recited; they are imperatives for the common good. Our faith challenges each of us to examine how we can contribute to an ethic which cherishes life, puts people before things, and values kindness and compassion over anger and vengeance. A growing sense of national fear and failure must be replaced by a new commitment to solidarity and the common good.

III. CATHOLIC TRADITION, PRESENCE, AND POTENTIAL

In this task, the Catholic community has much at stake and much to contribute. What we believe, where we are, and how we live out our faith can make a great difference in the struggle against violence. We see the loss of lives. We serve the victims. We feel the fear. We must confront this growing culture of violence with a commitment to life, a vision of hope, and a call to action. Our assets in this challenge include:

- the *example and teaching* of Jesus Christ;
- the *biblical values* of respect for life, peace, justice, and community;
- *our teaching* on human life and human dignity, on right and wrong, on family and work, on justice and peace, on rights and responsibilities;
- *our tradition* of prayer, sacraments, and contemplation which can lead to a disarmament of the heart;
- a *commitment to marriage and family life,* to support responsible parenthood and to help parents teach their children the values to live full lives;

- a *presence* in most neighborhoods—our parishes and schools, hospitals and social services are sources of life and hope in places of violence and fear;
- an *ethical framework* which calls us to practice and promote virtue, responsibility, forgiveness, generosity, concern for others, social justice, and economic fairness;
- a *capacity for advocacy* that cuts across the false choices in national debate—jails or jobs, personal or social responsibility, better values or better policies;
- a *consistent ethic of life* which remains the surest foundation for our life together.

Across our land, parishioners and priests, men and women religious, educators and social workers, parents and community leaders are hard at work trying to offer hope in place of fear, to fight violence with programs of peace, to strengthen families and weaken gangs.

Here are a few examples of ongoing efforts in dioceses and parishes to deal with violence in their communities:

- In Los Angeles, the Church through its "Hope in Youth" initiative works with others to combat gang violence with youth opportunities and economic development.
- In Boston, the Ten Point Coalition is an ecumenical group of clergy and lay leaders working to mobilize the Christian community around issues affecting African American youth—especially those at risk.
- The Diocese of Cleveland coordinated an interfaith, gun turn-in program that took more than 1,500 weapons off the streets.
- In Chicago, youth outreach efforts include conflict management; workshops on violence, drugs, and health; and positive alternatives to violence. A business training program called "Something Good for the Hood" was

created by St. Sabina's Parish to teach youth and young adults responsibility and work skills.

- In Saginaw, the Office of Black Catholic Concerns uses a multimedia approach—marches, TV, radio, PSAs—with gang members to help them refocus their lives and reconnect with Church and community.
- The Toledo Diocese, in cooperation with the local YMCA, involves elementary schools in "conflict resolution and peer mediation" to heighten the awareness of the root causes of violence and address them.
- The Dioceses of Palm Beach and Billings offered the program *Building a Sacred Bridge of Reconciliation,* which challenges traditional attitudes about women that contribute to domestic abuse. The program is sponsored by the National Council of Catholic Women.
- Catholic parishes joined in the Greater Bridgeport Interfaith Action, which successfully passed a ban on assault weapons later upheld by the courts.
- In Phoenix, the social action office has made available to parents suggestions for responsible TV viewing and ways to approach local stations regarding antiviolence themes.
- In Jackson, Miss., Catholic Charities sponsors a shelter for battered families which serves 350 women and children each year from seven rural counties providing transitional housing, legal assistance, and individual and group counseling.
- Little Friends for Peace, in the Washington, D.C. area, is an organization dedicated to teaching nonviolent skills to young children through playful skill-building activities.
- The Diocese of Pittsburgh has joined a community-wide program for young people at risk providing viable alternatives to gangs through educational, recreational, and employment opportunities.

Economic, social, and moral forces can tear apart communities and families not as quickly, but just as surely, as bullets and knives.

Fundamentally, our society needs a moral revolution to replace a culture of violence with a renewed ethic of justice, responsibility, and community.

In parishes and schools, human service agencies, and family life and youth programs, our community of faith offers alternatives to violence, a commitment to education, and a source of hope and help in places of fear and failure. Now is the time for all of us to follow their leadership, to build on their example, to place our facilities at the service of the community. Our young people, especially, need support and challenge, discipline and opportunities to use their talents and carry out their responsibilities in a world of conflicting values and often dangerous choices.

IV. A Framework for Action

Much is being done, but more is required. Our community is called to reorganize its priorities and recommit its resources to confront the violence in our midst. This challenge will have many dimensions including:

- the call to *pray* for peace in our hearts and our world;
- the ability to *listen*—to hear the pain, anger, and frustration that come with and from violence;
- the duty to *examine* our own attitudes and actions for how they contribute to or diminish violence in our society;
- the call to help people *confront* the violence in their hearts and lives;
- the capacity to *build on existing efforts* and the strengths of our community: the work of parishes, schools, Catholic Charities, the Campaign for Human Development, and so forth;

- efforts to *hold major institutions accountable,* including government, the media and the criminal justice system;
- an *advocacy* strategy which moves beyond the often empty rhetoric of national debate, including:
  - — confronting the violence of *abortion;*
  - — curbing the easy availability of *deadly weapons;*
- supporting community approaches to *crime prevention and law enforcement,* including community policing, neighborhood partnerships with police, and greater citizen involvement;
- pursuing swift and effective *justice* without vengeance;
- support for efforts to attack *root causes* of crime and violence—including poverty, substance abuse, lack of opportunity, racism, and family disintegration;
- promoting more *personal responsibility* and broader social responsibility in our policies and programs;
- *building bridges* and promoting solidarity across racial and economic lines;
- pursuing *economic justice*, especially employment;
- working for legislation that *empowers parents* to choose and afford schools that reflect their values;
- overcoming the tragedy of *family violence* and confronting all forms of violence against women;
- promoting education, research, and training in *nonviolence;*
- responding to *victims* of violence, hearing their anguish and defending their dignity;
- *strengthening families* by putting the needs of children and families first in our national priorities;
- continuing to work for *global disarmament,* including curbs on arms sales and a ban on the export of land mines.

Unless we are able to cut through divisive rhetoric and false claims that suggest that more prisons are the only answer, more brutality the cure, or more violence the solution, we will not succeed. Our criminal justice system is failing. Too often, it does not offer security to society, just penalties and rehabilitation to offenders, or respect and restitution to victims. Clearly, those who commit crimes must be swiftly apprehended, justly tried, appropriately punished, and held to proper restitution. However, correctional facilities must do more than confine criminals; they must rehabilitate persons and help rebuild lives. The vast majority of those in prison return to society. We must ensure that incarceration does not simply warehouse those who commit crimes but helps them overcome the behaviors, attitudes, and actions that led to criminal activity. The answer is not simply constructing more and more prisons but also constructing a society where every person has the opportunity to participate in economic and social life with dignity and responsibility. People must answer for their actions. Those who harm others must pay the price, but all our institutions must also be held accountable for how they promote or undermine greater responsibility and justice.

Bumper sticker solutions—"three strikes and you're out"..."two years and you're off"..."one more child and your benefits are cut"—are no substitute for less appealing but more effective efforts to fight crime and strengthen families. Our nation needs to focus its energies and resources on helping communities combat crime and helping families overcome destructive moral and economic pressures, discrimination, and dependency. Our policies must help people escape poverty and discrimination and leave behind lives of addiction, self-destruction, and crime. We need both to hold people accountable *and* offer them concrete help and hope for a better future.

We also need to encourage a commitment to civility and respect in public life and communications—in the news media, politics, and even ecclesial dialogue. The search for the common

good is not advanced by partisan gamesmanship, challenging other people's motives, or personal attacks. The focus on the sensational, the search for conflict, and the assumption of bad will are not the basis for dialogue and hurt the search for common ground.

The culture of violence also has worldwide dimensions. As the only world superpower, as the world's greatest consumer, and as the largest arms exporter, the United States has a special obligation to seek peace and promote justice through creative and responsible world leadership. We renew our commitment expressed in *The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace* to work against the violence that threatens life in so many lands. Our nation must be engaged in devising new tools for promoting peace: finding ways to prevent and police conflicts, to protect basic rights, to promote integral human development, and to preserve the environment. The United States must move from leadership in supplying arms to leadership in providing resources, technology, and knowledge and for replacing conflict with peaceful progress. Rather than restrain the further development of the United Nations, the United States should help improve it by developing tools for preventing conflict, mediating disputes, and rescuing vulnerable populations from internal as well as external aggression. Catholic international education, outreach, and advocacy efforts need to continue to help shape a Church and nation more clearly committed to global responsibility and the pursuit of peace in a still violent world.

Our criminal justice system is failing. Too often, it does not offer security to society, just penalties and rehabilitation to offenders, or respect and restitution to victims.

Perhaps the greatest challenge is the call for all of us to examine our own lives, to identify how we can choose generosity over selfishness, and choose a real commitment to family and community over individual acquisition and ambition. In many small ways, each of us can help overcome violence by dealing with it on our block; providing for the emotional, physical, and spiritual needs of our children; dealing with our own abusive behavior; or even treating fellow motorists with courtesy. Violence is overcome day by day, choice by choice, person by person. All of us must make a contribution.

We believe our ongoing *Catholic Campaign for Children and Families* is an important voice against violence and should focus with new priority and renewed urgency on how violence of every kind undermines the lives and dignity of families and children. As we carry this campaign forward, we will work for private action and public policy which help curb the violence in our land. Above all, the Church must be Church—a community of faith reaching out to affirm and protect life, teaching right from wrong, educating the young, serving the hurting, healing the wounds, building community, praying and working for peace.

V.
WE CAN BE MORE THAN WE ARE

The Catholic community is in a position to respond to violence and the threat of violence in our society with new commitment and creativity. More of the same is not sufficient. Business as usual is not enough. Our faith and facilities can be beacons of hope and safety for those seeking refuge from violent streets and abusive homes. People can become peacemakers in their homes and communities. Parishes can organize mentoring programs for teen parents. The Church can be the first point of referral for spousal abuse. We can incorporate ways to handle family conflict in our religious education and sacramental preparation programs. We can work for public policies that confront violence, build community, and promote responsibility. Finally, we can join with other churches in developing a community-wide strategy for making our neighborhoods more safe, welcoming, and peaceful. Here is a possible outline for action:

Worship and Preaching: Parishes can invite parishioners to begin meetings and events with prayers for peace and an end to violence. The Sunday eucharistic celebration provides many opportunities for prayer and reflection on these themes, especially during the Penitential Rite and General Intercessions. The homily can be a powerful means of promoting the scriptural call to peacemaking and to deepen our own relationship with Jesus, the source of true peace. The priest, adding a few words of his own as introduction, may wish to reinforce the significance of the Rite of Peace. Special Penance Services can be held, especially during Advent and Lent, to call us away from aggressive and violent behavior to that of peacemaking. We ask our preachers to consider how their preaching can be a call to peacemaking and a voice against violence in our families, neighborhoods, and the broader community.

Violence is overcome day by day, choice by choice, person by person. All of us must make a contribution.

Education: Our Catholic schools are a very significant bulwark against violence. They continue to offer moral and ethical foundations, discipline, and safety for millions of children. Schools can encourage dialogue between parents and youth, can teach basic values and conflict resolution, and can provide after-school programs (especially between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.) for neighborhood youth. Just as clearly, our parish religious education programs can provide the values and support that can help people, especially young people, choose life and reject violence. Our schools and parish religious education programs can be vital safe havens for youth at risk.

Young Adult and Adult Education Programs in parishes can provide classes and learning experiences in parenting, conflict resolution, and spiritual development. Small-group faith-sharing can provide opportunities for adults to share their experiences and learn from others. We can form our consciences, strengthen our commitment, and exercise our free will in ways that promote justice and resist violence.

Family Ministry: The family is the key to the development of positive values, including peacemaking. Families need to talk about how violence affects each member, the family itself, and their neighborhood and to discuss ways of responding in a nonviolent manner. So much violent behavior has its roots in the deterioration of family life. Families that are experiencing domestic violence should search out helping organizations to assist them in overcoming this burden. Families can also use the evening dinner prayer or a prayer at other times to pray for peace within the family and community and within each individual. Family life ministry can provide parenting education, support groups, and marriage preparation programs that encourage faithful, healthy, and peaceful relationships. They also can offer media literacy resources to help parents take back control of their own television sets.

Our faith and facilities can be beacons of hope and safety for those seeking refuge from violent streets and abusive homes.

Youth Ministry plays a unique role within the parish by providing young people with a community of peers and adults who affirm, support, and challenge them. Youth programs can provide a safe and healthy place where young people can gather rather than hanging out on the street corner or at the local shopping mall. While some sports programs can contribute to violent behavior, well-directed athletic programs that teach sportsmanship and promote cooperation can have a positive influence on our young people. Retreats—such a powerful experience for teens—can be developed around the theme of peacemaking and conflict resolution. Parishes can offer leadership training programs to develop positive life skills around Christian values. Music, which plays such a significant role in the life of youth, should be used as an instrument to discuss peacemaking and nonviolent behavior. Parish and school youth programs can offer real alternatives to gang membership.

Outreach: Working with their local Catholic Charities agencies, parishes can support and make use of shelters and hotlines for abused family members providing financial support and volunteer assistance. The remarkable response to our statement on

violence against women, *When I Call for Help,* has yielded many models of education and outreach. Parish groups can also organize recreational programs for at-risk youth, child care and emergency pregnancy centers, and mentoring programs for youth and beginning families.

Advocacy: Parish and diocesan representatives and other groups can meet with media representatives to bring pressure against excessive violence and pornography. Legislative networks can advocate for public policies that prevent and combat crime, restrict dangerous weapons, promote safe communities, eliminate the death penalty, help lift people out of the "hellish cycle of poverty," and confront the violence of abortion.

Building Community: Parishes can participate in wider community efforts to combat crime and work on local housing and education issues, enact spousal abuse laws, and create economic opportunities and viable alternatives to violence. Supporting the Campaign for Human Development in its funding of local self-help groups is an excellent way to help build and empower communities in their battle against violence.

Global Solidarity: Through twinning relationships, through support of Catholic Relief Services' Operation Rice Bowl, and through advocacy on United States international policies, parishes can work against reliance on violence to resolve conflicts and for human rights and sustainable development throughout the world.

African American and Hispanic Catholic Ministries: Continuing to provide exceptional leadership, these ministries bring together diverse groups across racial and ethnic lines to work against racism and violence and provide opportunities for young people.

Dioceses can support the efforts of parishes by supporting and sharing successful antiviolence models. We can also organize diocesan-wide efforts such as visits to local media outlets, coordinated social services, convocations, and training. As Church, we must continue our commitment to examine our own policies and

practices to eliminate any form of abuse within our own church community wherever it may exist. Diocesan leadership can help our local communities of faith come together to resist violence and promote practical steps to make our neighborhoods more just and more peaceful places. We can work with other religious bodies and community groups to make common cause against violence. Our struggle against violence will be an integral part of an interfaith initiative, the Common Ground for the Common Good. Working with other religious groups, we will seek to advance the common good by overcoming the violence that hurts us all.

We recognize that this reflection is less an outline of solutions and more a call to action. We believe the most effective response to this problem is one that builds on the resources of the local community. To promote and support these local efforts, the committees of our Conference who have expressed a special interest in this initiative (African American Catholics, Campaign for Human Development, Communications, Domestic Social Policy, Education, Hispanic Affairs, Laity, Marriage and Family Life, Pro-Life, Women in Society and in the Church, and Youth) will continue to work together to collect effective models and resources and make them available to parishes and dioceses.

We hope that Catholics and Catholic organizations at all levels will join us and respond to this call. Each of us can make a difference. For our part, the NCCB/USCC will in the weeks and months to come:

- gather and disseminate resources and models for parish and diocesan efforts.
- intensify our advocacy on national policies that address violence, including strengthening families, violence in the media, the availability of drugs and dangerous weapons, the violence of abortion and the use of the death penalty, and other economic and social policies that attack the root causes of violence.

We can demonstrate our common commitment in a visible way by focusing on the moral and human costs of violence between January 15 and January 22. January 15 is the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a powerful voice for nonviolence and peace. January 22 is the anniversary of the Supreme Court decision legalizing the destruction of unborn children, a terrible sign of the violence in our society. In the days between these two anniversaries, we ask Catholic dioceses, parishes, families, and organizations to join us in prayer, reflection, and action to confront the culture of violence in our midst. The theme of peacemaking is especially appropriate at this time of year when Christian churches pray and gather to reflect on the challenge of unity within the Body of Christ and the human family.

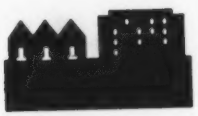
[W]e must come to understand that violence is unacceptable. We must learn again the lesson of Pope Paul VI, "If you want peace, work for justice."

VI. CONCLUSION

Above all, we must come to understand that violence is unacceptable. We must learn again the lesson of Pope Paul VI, "If you want peace, work for justice."[9] We oppose lawlessness of every kind. Society cannot tolerate an ethic that uses violence to make a point, settle grievances, or help us get what we want. But the path to a more peaceful future is found in a rediscovery of personal responsibility, respect for human life and human dignity, and a recommitment to social justice. The best antidote to violence is hope. People with a stake in society do not destroy communities. Both individuals *and* institutions should be held accountable for how they attack or enhance the common good. It is not only the

9. Pope Paul VI, "Message of His Holiness Pope Paul VI for the Celebration of the [World] Day of Peace," January 1, 1972.

"down and out" who must be held accountable but also the "rich and famous." Our society needs both more personal responsibility *and* broader social responsibility to overcome the plague of violence in our land and the lack of peace in our hearts. Finally, we must realize that peace is most fundamentally a gift from God. It is futile to suggest that we can end all violence and bring about full peace merely by our own efforts. This is why we urge the Catholic community to join all our antiviolence efforts with constant and heartfelt prayer to Almighty God through Jesus, the Prince of Peace.



"We hope somebody, somewhere, somehow, will do something about the conditions which are causing our children to kill each other."

We close these reflections with a word of support and appreciation for those on the "front lines"—parents, pastors, parish leaders, youth workers, catechists and teachers, prison chaplains, men and women religious. At a time when heroes seem scarce, these people are real heroes and heroines, committing their lives to the service of others, standing against a tide of violence with values of peace and a commitment to justice. We commend peace officers who daily confront violence with fairness and courage and we support those who minister to them and their families. We also offer a word of encouragement to parents who daily confront the cultural messages that influence their children in a way that is so contradictory to basic values of decency, honesty, respect for life and justice.

We believe silence and indifference are not options for a community of faith in the midst of such pain, but we recognize words cannot halt violence. We hope this message has helped to outline the moral challenge, affirm the efforts already underway, share the framework we have as Catholics, and call our community to both conversion and action.

The nation has been transfixed by the terrible tragedy of the five-year-old dropped to his death by two children in Chicago because he wouldn't steal candy. We must get beyond our fear and frustration, our indifference and ideological blinders, to hear his grandmother's cry at his funeral: "We hope somebody, some-

where, somehow, will do something about the conditions which are causing our children to kill each other."[10] We can be the "somebody." Now can be the time.

Let 1995 and the years that follow be a time when the Catholic community brings new energy and creativity to the vocation of peacemaking—within our families, within our neighborhoods, within our country, and within the world community. Let us embrace the challenge of John Paul II in his message to young people, when he calls them and all of us, to be "communicators of hope and workers for peace."[11] Let us hear and act with new urgency on the words of Jesus: "Blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9).

10. *The Baltimore Sun*, October 21, 1994.
11. Pope John Paul II, "Message to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of the IX and X World Youth Days," in *Come Home to Christ: World Youth Day '94 Resource Manual* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference Publishing Services, 1994), p. 8; cf. Matthew 5:9.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION

"Above all, the Church must be Church —
a community of faith reaching out to affirm
and protect life,
teaching right from wrong, educating the
young, serving the hurting,
healing the wounds, building community,
praying and working for peace."

This collection of resources is offered to help parishes and individuals respond to the bishops' call to prayer, reflection, and action to overcome the culture of violence in our midst. Antiviolence efforts can be integrated into everyday parish activities as well as new initiatives. The following materials offer both suggestions for what parishes can do and examples of what parishes are already doing. Some materials are available for purchase, others for the cost of mailing, and others free of charge.

Parish/Community Assessment

A first step might be an assessment of the parish's particular situation—the specific concerns and experiences of parishioners, the violence in the local community, ongoing efforts and the resources the parish brings to this problem. The following questions can be raised at parish councils, social concerns committees, or other meetings.

- What is "violence" for our parish community? Where do we find it? In our hearts? In our homes? In our businesses? In our schools? In our neighborhoods?
- What are we already doing to address violence? What more should we be doing?
- What are others doing? Can we join them?

- What resources do we bring? What resources can we obtain?
- What specific steps can we take as a parish to work against violence? How can we resist violence by how we pray, educate, advocate, and reach out to others?

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Prayer/Worship

- In planning for Sunday and weekday eucharistic celebrations, consider how themes of nonviolence/ peacemaking are reflected in the readings. Appropriately integrate these themes in the introductory comments at the beginning of Mass, General Intercessions, homily, Rite of Peace, music, and announcements.
- Use blessings from the Catholic *Book of Blessings* (e.g., Blessing of a Victim of Crime or Oppression) and *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* (e.g., prayer for Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday) to respond to the needs of the community. Call (800) 235-USCC to obtain copies of both publications.
- Invite families to pray for peace together and open parish activities with prayers for peace (e.g., Prayer of St. Francis).
- Hold a novena for peace or a special prayer or reconciliation service focused on resistance to violence. Obtain *Liturgies of Lament* by calling (800) 933-1800.
- Emphasize themes of nonviolence and peacemaking in preaching and petitions on appropriate occasions throughout the year, such as the World Day of Peace, Feast of St. Francis, Respect Life Sunday, Memorial Day, World Youth Day, Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday, and so forth.
- Recognize the efforts of peacemakers and those on the "front lines" of violence—police, teachers, prison workers, and volunteers—at parish worship.

Education/Formation

- Address the issue of violence in sacramental preparation programs (where appropriate) such as spousal abuse in marriage preparation; child abuse in baptismal preparation; forgiveness, and nonviolent and peaceful behavior as part of an examination of conscience in the sacrament of reconciliation; and peacemaking themes in preparation for Eucharist and confirmation.
- Obtain materials on how to integrate peacemaking and conflict resolution in the school and religious education curriculum. (See examples below.)
- Offer adult education courses which teach effective parenting, conflict resolution, and communication skills. (See examples.)
- Organize before- and after-school programs for children and young adults.
- Clearly communicate the Church's message of respect for life and peacemaking in preaching and education.

Youth Ministry/Religious Education

- Invite senior high school youth from an inner-city parish and a suburban parish to come together for dialogue and discussion on violence and peacemaking.
- Sponsor a special night for parents and youth to discuss violence in the community and develop one action step which the parish and family can take to combat violence.
- Use "peacemaking" as the theme for a weekend or day retreat.
- Create a summer project or activity for the youth of the parish emphasizing "peacemaking." Plan and implement a community-based, interdenominational "Stop the Violence" summer service program.

Family Life

- Suggest that families hold regular family meetings to talk about handling anger and frustration and their reactions to violence in the community.
- Provide support through the parish school, home and school association, and youth group for parents who are attempting to limit their children's exposure to violence, e.g., video games, television, movies, comic books, and so forth.
- Keep copies of *When I Call for Help* on the parish book rack and use the video "When You Preach, Remember Me" to raise awareness of spousal abuse. Call (800) 235-USCC to purchase the statement and video.

Outreach/Charity

- Make parish facilities available for antiviolence efforts—youth activities, parent support groups, crime watch and ex-offender programs.
- Contact Catholic Charities about programs that serve the victims of domestic and other violence and to find out about available training and assistance.
- Use parish bulletins to publicize local social services such as family counseling, substance abuse, and programs for abused family members and victims of crime.
- Contact your diocese or local volunteer agency to publicize volunteer opportunities.
- Collect clothing, food, and toys for family violence shelters.

Public Policy/Advocacy

- Learn about the resources and information available from diocesan social justice, pro-life, family life, Hispanic, and African American Catholic offices as well as other ecumenical groups and community organizations.

- Speak out against violence by joining your diocesan or state Catholic conference legislative network. Organize parishioners to advocate antiviolence policy.
- Hold nonpartisan forums with public officials and candidates.
- Join the "Catholic Campaign for Children and Families." Obtain copies of the video, "I Am Only a Child"; the statement, *Putting Children and Families First*; and the parish resource, *A Catholic Campaign for Children and Families*. Call (800) 235-USCC.
- Contact state or national organizations that work against violence, including the U.S. Catholic Conference, (202) 541-3195; National Committee for a Human Life Amendment, (202) 393-0703; Pax Christi, (814) 453-4955.

Building Community/Organizing

- Contact your diocesan director for the Campaign for Human Development (CHD) or diocesan social action director to learn how your parish can join or support community projects fighting violence and crime.
- Strengthen your parish's support for CHD.
- Join with nearby churches and organizations to work on antiviolence issues (e.g., building a cooperative relationship between the community and police, working for expanded after-school and recreation programs, and so forth).
- Invite a representative of a community organization to speak to youth and adult education classes about the organization's efforts to combat violence and promote strong communities.

Communications/Media

- Encourage young people as they watch TV programs to identify both subtle and explicit acts of violence and their reactions to them.
- Suggest that parishioners call or write local stations and advertisers about programs that exploit or avoid violence. Organize a dialogue with local TV stations.

- Encourage "media literacy." Obtain copies of the "Family Guide to Viewing TV" from your diocesan communications office.
- Contact the Center for Media Literacy for a copy of "Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media." Call (800) 226-9494.
- Make available USCC movie and TV reviews and ratings (found in most diocesan newspapers) to help families avoid violent programming. *The Family Guide to Movies and Videos* is available from USCC; call (800) 235-USCC.

Global Solidarity/Peacemaking

- Support Catholic overseas aid and development efforts through Catholic Relief Services, (410) 625-2220; the Holy Childhood Association, (202) 775-8637; the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, (212) 826-1480; and annual and special collections for international needs.
- Contact the "Adopt a Parish Program" of the Diocese of Nashville to connect your parish with another parish abroad. Call (615) 847-5022 for more information.
- Invite persons from your local community who have visited or worked in areas of conflict (missionaries, Peace Corps workers, or Catholic Relief Services staff) to speak at your parish about what you can do.
- Contact your local Catholic Charities agency about your parish sponsoring a refugee family.
- Urge your congressional representative and the U.S. government to stop sending weapons abroad, to play a greater role in supporting UN peacekeeping, and to pursue other peace-promoting and post-war reconstruction policies. Call the USCC Office of International Justice and Peace, (202) 541-3199.
- Read and reflect on *The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace*. Call (800) 235-USCC to purchase a copy.

WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING

Parishes across the country are deeply involved in antiviolence efforts. Here are just a few examples:

1. **Teens for Peace** in Rochester, N.Y., has developed an interdenominational program, "Live the Dream . . . Stop the Violence," including a community prayer service, billboard campaign, and pledge cards for individual action. Call (716) 328-3210.

2. Several high schools in Grand Island, Neb., joined together to sponsor a **Youth Congress on Violence** involving discussion, education, and development of belief statements and action strategies leading to concrete actions from the involved schools. Call (308) 382-4660.

3. The San Diego youth office has sponsored a **forum on youth violence** and identified ways in which churches and civic groups can work together. Call (619) 490-8260.

4. The Office of Youth Ministry in Rockville Centre, N.Y., has developed a two-day **retreat**, "It Takes Courage: Peacemaking in a Culture of Violence," geared for high school youth. Call (516) 678-5800.

5. Through the King County Organizing Project (KCOP) in Seattle, Catholic parishes are joining in the **LOYAL Campaign**, which is working to raise the legal age for possession of firearms from 14 to 21; targeting 35-45 schools to implement a school-wide antiviolence curriculum; and training 100 youth to be leaders in the campaign. Call (206) 762-9830.

6. **The Crime and Drug Task Force** of Communities United for Action (CUFA), a church based organizing project in Cincinnati, Ohio, is focusing on crime and drug activity. They are currently (1) organizing neighborhood safety committees to train block-watch groups and to monitor community-oriented policing programs; (2) working for more youth educational, recreational, and employment opportunities; and (3) advocating for legislation requiring allocation of 50 percent of assets seized through drug arrests for community drug prevention and treatment programs. Call (513) 541-2709.

7. Through the New Orleans Interfaith Sponsoring Committee, 17 churches launched a city-wide **campaign against drugs**. Three thousand members participated and won a commitment from the mayor to develop a master antidrug plan for the city. Call (504) 865-7761.

8. St. John Baptist de la Salle Parish in Chillum, Md., has developed a **religious education program** that encourages peace within the individual, family, community, and world. Call (301) 559-6232 or (301) 927-5474.

9. A lay Catholic community, *Agape*, offers **programs on nonviolence** in New England dioceses, including teacher training, parenting seminars, conflict resolution, and retreats. Call (413) 967-9369.

10. A number of Catholic schools in Omaha, Neb., use the **Discipline with a Purpose** program. This school-wide discipline program develops 15 different skills including resolving problems, leadership, cooperation, and completing tasks. Call (402) 691-0799.

11. Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in the Anacostia area of Washington, D.C., organized a **support group** to help family members who have been victims of violent crimes to share their experience and pain. Call (202) 678-4999.

12. Youth ministry at Transfiguration Parish in Los Angeles focuses on young people of differing ethnic groups before they get caught up in a gang. The meetings and retreats use role playing and **peer counseling** to cover such topics as sexual abstinence, rape, drug abuse, and peer pressure. Call (213) 751-2021.

13. Catholic Charities Corp. of Cleveland, Ohio, operates **Good Feelings and a Good Life for Hispanics** to prevent domestic violence, providing education and services to Hispanic families and a referral network for battered women and their children. Call (216) 391-2040.

14. St. Aloysius Catholic Church and First Presbyterian Church of Long Island, N.Y., have begun an ecumenical exchange program with Catholic and Presbyterian congregations in Northern Ireland. The Protestants and Catholics in Kilrea are now

working together for the first time to bridge the historic divide between their two communities. Call (202) 541-3196.

Several other programs are cited in the bishops' statement. Here's how to reach them:

Hope in Youth	(310) 291-8773
Ten Point Coalition	(617) 442-1431
Diocese of Cleveland	(216) 696-6525
Something Good for the Hood	(312) 483-HOOD
Saginaw Office of Black Catholics	(517) 799-7910
Toledo Diocese	(419) 244-6711
National Council of Catholic Women	(202) 682-0334
The Greater Bridgeport Interfaith Action	(203) 372-4304
Phoenix Diocesan Social Action Office	(602) 997-6105
Catholic Charities of Jackson, Miss.	(601) 355-8634
Little Friends for Peace	(301) 927-5474
Diocese of Pittsburgh	(412) 456-6980

These programs are examples of parishes making a difference. For more information, resources, and models return the form in the back of this booklet.

Sharing Models/Examples

The USCC Office of Domestic Social Development is working with other offices and groups to collect examples of antiviolence efforts in dioceses and parishes around the country and to share them with interested persons. If you are involved in such efforts and would like to share your program or materials with others, please send a copy or description to:

"Confronting a Culture of Violence"
Office of Domestic Social Development
United States Catholic Conference
3211 Fourth Street, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20017

Or call: **(202) 541-3185**

Additional Materials

If you are interested in receiving additional materials such as those found in the "Suggestions for Action," please return this form to the above address.

____ I would like to receive further information on antiviolence efforts in parishes and dioceses.

Name:_____
Title/Office: _____
Parish/Diocese: _____
Address: _____
City/State/ZIP: _____
Phone: _____

More Resources from USCC

The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace
A Reflection of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on the Tenth Anniversary of The Challenge of Peace
Confronts the trend to isolationism in U.S. foreign policy, acknowledges the importance of nonviolence, and focuses on a new agenda for peace.
English: No. 705-7, 28 pp.; Spanish: No. 706-5, 28 pp.

The following resources highlight the situation of children in our nation and call the Catholic community to action through a statement, practical planning and support materials, and a compelling video:

Putting Children and Families First
A Challenge for Our Church, Nation, and World
Bishops' Statement: **No. 469-4, 24 pp.**

A Catholic Campaign for Children and Families
Parish Resource Manual: **English: No. 525-9, 88 pp.; Spanish: No. 534-8, 48 pp.**

I Am Only a Child
Video: **English: No. 747-2, 14 minutes; Spanish: No. 748-0, 14 minutes.**

These resources focus on the social justice dimension of parish life—outlining the challenge and providing a framework for action and practical suggestions for parishes:

Communities of Salt and Light
Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish
Bishops' Statement: **English: No. 701-4, 24 pp.; Spanish: No. 724-3, 24 pp.**
Parish Resource Manual: **No. 702-2, 52 pp.**
Video: **No. 703-0, 14 minutes.**

To order these publications or to obtain a catalog of other USCC publications, call toll-free 1-800-235-USCC. Outside the United States, call 1-301-209-9020.

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